

India and Pakistan

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HUGH TINKER

India and Pakistan
A Political Analysis

Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged



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For Elisabeth
with love

Note to Second Edition

The text has been revised to cover events up to July 1967. Chapter 10 has been entirely rewritten. The Guide to Further Reading has been revised and updated.

H. T.

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I

Traditional Society and Authority

NEW NATIONS and ancient cultures: this is how most people see India and Pakistan today. New, experimental systems of democracy, in which parliament and the ballot box are still under trial, are contrasted with the ancient ritual of Hinduism and Islam, caste and tribalism, the art and architecture of Ajanta and the Red Fort, the literature of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Babur-Nama*. Yet the paradox of this new-old land is even more complex: ancient social and religious thought and custom intermingle with the ideologies and social attitudes of the West; while the new politics of the people goes hand in hand with the authoritarian tradition of government bequeathed by the Mughal and the British-Indian empires.

Society, ideas and modes of government are all in flux; and all interact upon each other. It is not only that parliamentary government is hazarded by social and religious forces; by caste-ism or Muslim fanaticism, for example. It is also sapped by the immemorial view of government itself as a dome of absolute authority, suspended high above ordinary folk; a power which they might supplicate or might even, possibly, manipulate, but which they could never hope to draw into their own hands. The attainment of a broad-based democracy may come about not so much by the actual functioning of democratic institutions, like parliament, as by social and religious change; by the demand of lower-caste people for social and economic parity; by the spread of adult education, and by the gradual emancipation of women from domestic immolation.

In order to appreciate the impact upon the civilisation of India of nineteenth-century ideas of the political virtues of representative

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government and twentieth-century ideas of the right of all peoples to independence, it is necessary to commence with a brief account of the nature of traditional society, and traditional systems of authority and government.

The historic unity of India is a theme which nationalist writers insist upon. It is not an empty dream. The eternal snows of the Himalaya, the great rivers of Sind (Indus) to the west and the Brahmaputra to the east form the legendary boundaries of Mother India, *Bharat Varsa*. This idea is expressed in political terms in the concept of *Çakravartin*, universal emperor, and the ideal has been almost realised in epic periods of Indian history. The vision is realised in socio-religious terms in the grand design of Hinduism. The silent peaks of the Himalaya are the abode of the Hindu pantheon; the great rivers—especially Mother Ganges, descending from the snows, fertilising a thousand miles of the northern plains—are sacred, cleansing, life-giving. From Sind to Brahmaputra, the priestly authority of the Brahmin receives supreme regard, while the despised, subhuman degradation of the Untouchable is equally universal.

Yet, the hundred years of British rule formed the only time when India was effectively linked together as an entity. The great rulers who aspired to bring all India under their sway invariably strained their resources to breaking-point—and helped to bring on the disruption of the empires they had created. Geography gives India an over-all unity: but geography also provides barriers which, even today, interpose formidable divisions. The first great divide comes between north and south. Peninsular India is separated from the northern plains by the Vindhya mountains, running due west to east. Few are the gaps between these jungle-covered hills, and their chain marks, to a surprising degree, the watershed between the small-boned, dark-skinned people of the south and the big-boned, lighter-skinned peoples of the north. The second great natural boundary is the Great Indian Desert, which spreads north from Kutch for 600 miles towards Delhi and Punjab, Land of the Five Rivers. This desert waste separates the riverine cultivation of the Sind from the rest of India; and provides the frontier between West Pakistan and India. The third barrier, India's rivers, is not so physically imposing, but is only slightly less obstructive. The Ganges flows across the northern plains, and the Brahmaputra descends from the Assam valley; their waters come together in Bengal, feeding a dozen wide and sluggish rivers. During the monsoon, these rivers—and, virtually, the eastern half of Bengal—become one vast lagoon. Isolated

by its riverways, Bengal has evolved upon its own, away from the mainstream of Indian life.*

These are only the most important of the natural divisions which have given India its provincial, regional character. Isolation has brought about linguistic variation; there are some twenty main regional languages, which are subdivided into hundreds of dialects. The northern group are usually called the Aryan languages, being largely derived from Sanskrit. The southern group—the Dravidian languages—has an entirely different root, though the priestly pre-eminence of Sanskrit has had its influence. There are important regional variations within the fold of Hinduism: southern India is a stronghold of Sivaism. The peninsula has a strong maritime tradition: the Malabar and Coromandel coasts have been important entrepôts since the days when they traded with Rome. The Cola kings of the south conquered Ceylon and penetrated South-east Asia; even today the most important source of Indian overseas emigration and capital investment is provided by the Tamils.

If southern India looks out across the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, north-west India looks across the mountains of the Hindu Kush (called by Ibn Batuta, 'the Hindu Killer') to Central Asia. Through long periods of history, northern India has been linked with Afghanistan, Persia and Turkistan. The locus of power has shifted beyond the Hindu Kush, and back to Delhi. From Central Asia came the conquering, proselytising apostles of Islam. For five hundred years, the northern plains were subject to Muslim rule. The rulers, governors, lawgivers and soldiers of fortune from Central Asia introduced new styles: in social usage, dress, architecture, law, language, and administration. Military conquest, as is usual, carried the prestige of success; many of these innovations were absorbed into Indian culture—particularly at its upper and urban levels. Jawaharlal Nehru has observed that India's 'peculiar quality is absorption, synthesis'. To some extent, this process of synthesis interacted between the Muslim invaders and Hindu society. Hinduism accepted certain Muslim features, notably *purdah* (the seclusion of women), and the Muslims

* Because of this isolation, Buddhism (which was overthrown in the rest of India by a Brahmanical revival) lingered on. Bengali rural society took the extraordinary resilience and resistance given by caste organisation, and a long Muslim conquerors carried out widespread conversions, providing a large Islamic pocket in eastern India. Elsewhere, Hinduism was powerful enough to resist large-scale Islamic proselytisation.

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borrowed from Hinduism, the marriage ritual in particular. The Muslims, believers in the brotherhood of all mankind (or, at any rate, of all Muslims), even absorbed parts of the caste system. They adopted classification by family, tribe and occupation, and restricted marriage accordingly, although they did not accept Hindu taboos upon the eating of food. Upper-class Muslims and Hindus in northern India developed a common language—Urdu or Hindustani (which took its grammar from Sanskrit, its vocabulary from Indian tongues, Persian, and Turki, and its script from Arabic). Similarly, their dress had many features in common.*

Under the Mughal emperors, Rajput princes received high command, in the army and as governors of important provinces; Brahmin and Kayastha ministers occupied key posts in the administration; and Hindu poets were encouraged to compose in Persian. More: two of the Mughal emperors were the sons of Hindu mothers. Among the ordinary people there was a certain sharing in religious and social practices, especially on the Bombay side and in Bengal (where a British writer later described the Muslim cultivators as 'circumcised Hindus'). Both communities would take part in the more public portions of each other's festivals. Hindus often worshipped at the tombs of Muslim saints; some Muslims of the trading castes took a Hindu name along with their Islamic names. Yet, despite these connexions between the two communities, they never coalesced.

For all its message of the universality of God and the brotherhood of man, Islam (like Judaism and Christianity) is an exclusive religion, regarding non-believers as *kafirs*, infidels. Although many of the Muslim rulers were tolerant towards their Hindu subjects, there was constant recurrence of oppression and forcible conversion. Moreover, the Muslim upper classes were very conscious of their ties of blood and culture with Central Asia and the Near East. The stock was constantly replenished from these areas, and the Muslim elite remained (like the British later) 'Strangers in India'. To this day, their magnificent mosques, forts, and palaces dominate the cities of northern India: yet these are almost as alien as the Gothic churches and colleges which Victorian Englishmen have left as their legacy to these same cities.

* The costume which Nehru almost always wore on public occasions—*achkan shalwar* and *chappi* (buttoned-up frock coat, tight white pyjama and cross-over sandals)—is pure Muslim dress. Nehru insisted that his mother tongue was Hindustani, not Hindi. His ancestors were officials of the Mughal court at Delhi.

The paradoxes of Hinduism also served to create lines of division. Hinduism sees the omnipotence of God in everything; it is tolerant and passive, yet absorptive and stifling. Hinduism would have accepted and assimilated the message of the Prophet Muhammad, as it had absorbed the message of Lord Buddha, as a manifestation of divine truth, yet only a facet of the wider insight of Hinduism. Faced with the harsh resolution of the faith of the desert, Hinduism could only draw back—and watch, and wait. The impenetrable defence was the web of caste. In social relations, the exclusiveness of caste—which restricts the circle of intercourse to a narrow, hereditary group—isolated Hindus (especially of the higher castes) from Muslims of the same class and calling. The Hindu emphasis upon ritual cleanliness and purity tended to identify the Muslim with unlawfulness and defilement (the generic term *mleccha*, applied to all non-Hindus, has a definite connotation of uncleanness). And so, throughout India, the two communities dwelt side by side, yet separate. In most areas, the Muslims were associated with administration or with military service, but they also developed hereditary occupations in which they were pre-eminent, such as metalwork. In consequence, they were mainly town-dwellers. Only here and there were they to be found settled on the land, usually as colonies of disbanded soldiers, on the Roman pattern. In Punjab and Bengal, however, the majority of the original cultivators were Muslims; and in these parts it was the Hindu commercial community which formed the majority of the town-dwellers. Muslim strength was in the 'Law and Order' or internal security services, and in the military; Hindu strength was mainly deployed in the financial departments of administration (including the all-important department which collected the revenue from agricultural land), in commerce, and in the priestly and literary occupations. Even so, Hindus of the warrior castes, such as Rajputs, were well represented in military service. Muslims thought of themselves as the ruling race. Hindus accepted their position as the ruled, under necessity; but they never forgot the golden, legendary age of *Ram Rajya*, when Hinduism reigned supreme.

So far, we have been considering the 'great society' of India as a whole; but the context of life for the great majority of ordinary folk was the 'little society' of the village. Much has been made of the 'self-sufficient' economy of the village, as well as its political autonomy and solidarity. A famous administrator, Charles Metcalfe, talked about the 'little republics', and his aphorism has been repeated by almost every

subsequent writer. It is true that, to the great mass of Indians, both of the past and the present, the village represents everything: home and family, a sense of belonging, security, life itself. But all this does not mean that the Indian village is self-sufficient. Even in centuries past, the village did not subsist upon its own resources. It was linked to surrounding hamlets, to a market town; perhaps to a place of pilgrimage or an administrative centre. This wider setting had its effect upon village economics. It was even more pervasive in the realm of family relationships: few castes contracted marriages within their own communities. Almost always they would go for their brides to a neighbouring village, and as the Indian family system involves well-defined dealings and contacts between the paternal and maternal clans, each village is involved in a web of relationships with the surrounding countryside. The structure of power is not confined within the village, however. Power is deployed upon a patron-dependant basis. Lowly folk will approach one held in high esteem by the village when they want to undertake almost any transaction—perhaps involving religious sanction, the consent of the village leaders, or a boon from the landlord. The patron assists his dependant in return for a specific *douceur*, most probably, but also in order to maintain a fund of loyalty within the village community, so that in any dispute or struggle for power he will be able to mobilise a following which will demonstrate his ascendancy. Similarly, in the relation between the village and its landlord, or the local *raja* or governor, there would be lines of mutual interest. Perhaps a certain village leader would be able to approach a superior because both were members of the same caste, or were linked by some other social or religious bond. The relationship would be founded on the same patron-client basis. The superior would consider giving favours to the village leader in return for the loyalty of the village if he were involved in some wider quarrel. A landlord might expect a whole village community to take to the jungle, leaving standing crops unharvested, if this would assist his struggle with higher authority.

All these relationships were based upon inequality. Within village society, the lower castes could never hope to improve their subordinate status. Strict sumptuary custom kept to a minimum their rights, to domestic possessions, to the village services, and to their share in village produce. The higher castes were quick to discipline any low-caste man who was so presumptuous as to eat off metalware, instead of vessels of clay, or a low-caste woman who presumed to cover her breasts. The lesson would be sharp enough to be not soon forgotten. Yet all the castes

had their appointed place in the hierarchy: none could be dispensed with. At the most intimate moments of birth and death, Brahmins and Rajputs were ritually dependent on the services of the lowest Sudras. The entire village united together in mutual protection against an external adversary. It was no coincidence that the village community developed its strongest spirit of cohesion in Punjab and the Delhi territory: the traditional invasion pathway from Central Asia into India.

Village solidarity has been supposed to reside in the institution of the *panchayat* or Council of Five. It has become fashionable in India to claim that the *panchayat* was the source of an indigenous system of village democracy and village co-operative effort. Exact scholarship demonstrates that the *panchayat* was mainly an institution of government for the caste or trade guild. But in certain areas the *panchayat* was apparently constituted on a village basis as an institution of judicial inquiry or arbitration. Here is a description of such a *panchayat*, as found in Oudh in 1850:

When a man suffers wrong, the wrongdoer is summoned before the elders or most respectable men of his village or clan; and if he denies the charge or refuses redress, he is told to bathe, put his hand upon the peepul tree and declare aloud his innocence. If he refuses, he is commanded to restore what he has taken, or make suitable reparation; and if he refuses to do this, he is punished by the odium of all and his life becomes miserable. A man does not put his hand upon the sacred tree and deny the truth—the gods sit in it and know all things.*

This is clearly not a picture of a system of village government. Villages might be controlled by an oligarchy of the principal caste leaders, or by a hereditary village headman (in the south, called the *patel*), or even by an agent of a great landlord. The main political links between the village and the government lay in the obligation to pay taxes—the Mughal Empire demanded payment of land revenue equivalent to half the crop—and the obligation to contribute forced labour on the roads, *begar*.

Government was a power apart. Its character is illustrated in this analysis of kingship in the *Sukraniti*, a late medieval political treatise:

The King is the ruler, protector, and benefactor of the people . . . he is lord of this earth because of his deeds in the previous births. . . .

* Quoted in the author's *Foundations of Local Self-Government in India, Pakistan, and Burma*, London 1954, 2nd edn 1968, p. 20

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The King should make the subjects acquire the habits of performing their duties by the use of his terrible sceptre. . . . The Prince who is virtuous is a part of the gods. . . .

To this concept of absolute, semi-divine kingship, the Muslim rulers added certain qualities. François Bernier, who visited the Mughal court in the seventeenth century, commented: 'The Great Mogol is a foreigner in Hindustan. . . . He finds himself in a hostile country, or nearly so; . . . he is under the necessity of keeping up numerous armies, even in the time of peace.' Foreign rule, military rule; this was the core of the Mughal system. Bernier described Delhi as 'a military encampment'.* The administrative hierarchy which the Mughals established was military in form: rank was determined according to seniority. This *mansabdari* system created, in effect, an imperial civil service, which formed the backbone of the empire. Three-quarters of these high officials were foreigners (Turks, Afghans, Persians). In theory, there was a dual hierarchy; one chain of officials responsible for law enforcement, the second supervising the collection of revenue. The key officials in the empire were the governors of provinces (termed *subahdar* or *nazim*). They exercised control of criminal justice. At their side was the *derwan* or finance minister. Provinces were divided into districts, where this dual pattern was reproduced, and districts were subdivided into units normally corresponding to the old Hindu administrative area, the *pargana*. The foundation of Mughal administration was the revenue inquest (not unlike Domesday) undertaken by the Emperor Akbar's Hindu revenue minister, Raja Todar Mal. Cultivated land throughout the empire was measured and recorded, and a monetary basis for assessment was substituted for payment in kind. An elaborate revenue staff was employed, with the *patwari* or village accountant at its base. The results of the survey were incorporated into a vast gazetteer—the *Ain-i-Akbari*—by a central revenue office, employing hundreds of clerks (mainly Hindus) who laboriously copied details from one register into another, copied and recopied orders, and submitted their work to superintendents for check and counter-signature.

The district system, with the district officer as head of the public services and general factorum or *Pooh Bah*, the erection of an administrative hierarchy upon the basis of land revenue collection, and the development of an involute maze of office procedure—these features of

* Quotations taken from the author's "People and Government in Southern Asia", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, Vol. 9, London 1959.

Mughal rule were all accepted as the foundation of British rule; and, indeed, to an astonishing degree, local administration in India and Pakistan today is Mughal in spirit.

By the victories of Plassey and Buxar (1757 and 1764), the East India Company became heir to the Mughal Empire, and in the following half-century extended its control over the greater part of the continent. But the Company was extremely reluctant to assume the external attributes of sovereignty. Until 1835, the coinage of the East India Company bore the Mughal superscription; the emperors were permitted to maintain the pretence of a court at Delhi; and the last of their line, Bahadur Shah, was not deposed until 1858, after the great Sepoy Revolt. As we have noted, the fabric of administration was Mughal, and change was slow to come. Persian remained the language of the law courts and of administration until the 1830s, and the post of *kazi*—the Muslim judge interpreting the law—was not abolished until 1864.

Among the British officials who formulated policy, a long struggle went on between the 'Orientalists' who opposed all change (even, for example, measures against *sati* or *suttee*, the burning of the widow upon her husband's funeral pyre) and the 'Anglicists' who wished to introduce Western ideas into government, social usages and education, and to transform the Indian mind by employing the English language as the medium of communication for the business of government and in the new colleges. In the reforming mood of the 1830s, the Anglicists largely prevailed. For twenty years, the British in India were a band of reformers, assailing traditional ideas and customs by means of Western education, legal reform and technological change. Then came the Sepoy Revolt called the Mutiny in British history-books, and the First War of Independence by modern Indian nationalist publications ('*War of Independence*'), This revolt was in widespread, and spread into a volume of bitterness, as to cause the British to reconsider their entire purpose and place in India. On the one hand, British concern in suppressing the revolt ('*to suppress the revolt*'), appeared to strengthen British confidence of British rule in India as the instrument of the British purpose. On the other hand, the violent economic losses by farmers in the revolt, and among the leaders of society appeared as a revolt against the activities of the British official mind. The British official mind became an opponent of reform. This mind is evident in the following words:

editorial printed in a Calcutta newspaper in 1873, the *Friend of India*. This journal had led the movement for reform in the 1830s, but after the Mutiny it lost its sense of purpose.

Avoid change; by removing obstructions rather than by supplying new stimulants, slowly develop, but do not violently upheave native society; leave rich and poor to themselves and their natural relations within the limits that prevent oppression.*

These words might serve as a threnody for British rule during its remaining ninety years.

The Indian response to the Westernising, reforming movement of the early nineteenth century was twofold. There was conservative opposition, expressed in the Mutiny, which was the reaction of almost all privileged groups threatened by the new innovations. This opposition was especially strong among the feudal aristocracy, among religious zealots, both Hindu and Muslim, and among those who had enjoyed power and influence in the old Mughal administration and in the quasi-independent princely enclaves. In its first phase, this conservative, traditionalist attitude was negative and defensive; it appeared to have suffered a shattering defeat in the Mutiny. The other response (the other side of the medal, as it were) was an Indian movement for social reform exhibiting all the qualities of absorption and synthesis which Nehru identifies as peculiarly Indian. The Erasmus of this movement was Ram Mohan Ray (1774-1833), a Brahmin of Bengal, who led the demand for English higher education and pioneered social reform. Yet he was no mere Westernising imitator. Observers as different as Marx and Macaulay anticipated that the British impact upon India would reproduce types and classes which duplicated European models. It was the genius of Ram Mohan to avert a slavish Westernisation by accepting, indeed welcoming, Western features into a living Hinduism. At a period when the European, or rather the Anglo-Protestant, ethos was predominant, he was constrained to demonstrate that India was not wholly primitive and obscurantist, as critics like Macaulay declared. He tried to show that social evils like *sati* were degenerate aberrations rather than essential attributes of Hinduism. He evolved an ethical system, the *Brahmo Samaj*, which was monotheistic, almost Christian in spirit; yet he also sowed the seed from which has sprung the modern *Vedanta* school of philosophy, to which belong such thinkers as Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, and Radhakrishnan. Ram Mohan helped to elevate

* Quoted in "People and Government in Southern Asia", *op. cit.*

contemporary Hinduism into a rational religion; his principal work was to translate sacred texts into the vernacular, particularly the *Upanisads*, which he rescued from centuries of oblivion.

The intellectual renaissance, which Ram Mohan Ray largely generated, was the forerunner of the political renaissance towards the end of the century. The spirit of rationalism and social reform, and a receptive attitude to Western ideas, prevailed among the majority of Indian political leaders till the end of the nineteenth century. But meanwhile, the conservative element had acquired a new and powerful dynamism. A movement called the *Arya Samaj* was founded in 1875 by a former Sanyasi (or wandering ascetic) known as Dayanand Saraswati. Its creed was militant and puritan, based upon the martial epic of Vedic scripture. One branch of the Arya Samaj was the Theosophical Society of Madame Blavatskaya and Annie Besant. Here was a complete reversal of values and attitudes! Instead of the decadent East looking to the omniscient West for education and reform, the West was turning to the East, to Hinduism and Buddhism as the matrix of religion and enlightenment. While Ram Mohan and his followers regarded British scholars as their friends and teachers, Dayanand Saraswati condemned all Christians and Muslims as *mlecchas*, and launched a campaign for the reconversion to Hinduism of Indians who had embraced other religions.

This pattern was largely repeated among the Muslims. The final collapse of the Mughal Empire, and the gradual eclipse of Muslim modes of government (particularly the replacement of an Islamic system of law by courts subscribing to the English Common Law), left the Muslim educated classes isolated, aloof and resentful. The Hindu literary castes, who had adapted themselves to the Persian communication of the Mughals, equally readily adapted themselves to the English language used by the British administration. But to Muslims, Persian and Arabic were not merely means of communication: they represented their religious and literary heritage. For half a century, the Muslims largely remained outside the new Western institutions of higher education, and to an increasing extent they were unable to enter the higher grades of the administration. Gradually, it became clear to the more forward-looking members of the community that, in consequence of their withdrawal, the Muslims had placed themselves at a crippling disadvantage; that the erstwhile pliant, submissive Hindus of the literary castes were in a fair way towards controlling the new institutions of government; that even if they made a determined effort to recapture

lost ground, the Muslims would be at least half a century behind their Hindu counterparts in their capability to manipulate the British administrative machine for their own advantage.

A valid interpretation of the subsequent Muslim separatist movement can be advanced in terms of the attempts by the Muslims to make up their disadvantage, to somehow win back the fifty years' start which the Hindu middle class had gained in the race for political and economic primacy.

The leading spirit in the Muslim revival was Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), a trusted official in the British service. His campaign to rehabilitate his community followed closely (though not consciously) the approach of Ram Mohan Ray. He reinterpreted Islamic doctrine so as to disarm Christian criticism (as by stressing the predominance of monogamy among Muslims). He attempted a synthesis of Islam with the new scientific rationalism, but he also took a firm stand against the attacks of Christian controversialists against Islam. He urged a return to the Quran, and asserted the supremacy of Islam among the religions of the world, because God uniquely revealed his purpose through the Quran. In practical applications of his ideas, Sayyid Ahmad, like Ram Mohan, believed that his community could be regenerated by Western education, by the absorption of Western thought into the Islamic cosmorama. He established the Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (1877), which eventually became the Muslim University.

As Ram Mohan was followed by Dayanand Saraswati, so Sayyid Ahmad was followed by Islamic thinkers (such as Akbar, of Allahabad) who preached a more reactionary militant creed, hostile to other religions.

To consider these trends in social terms: the influence of the mediating, modernist, Western-looking social reformers was confined entirely to the new professional middle classes. The traditionalist, militant West-rejecting reformers were also mainly middle class, but they did achieve some influence among the masses. The Arya Samaj had a considerable following in Punjab and the western part of the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh). The Islamic revivalists, notably the body called *Wahabis*, also had considerable influence, especially in Bengal, where they aroused the semi-Hinduised peasantry to a sense of belonging to the wider Islamic community. Indeed, the consequence of the revivalist movements on both sides was to accentuate the differences between Hindus and Muslims. Sayyid Ahmad talked of 'two races' in India: Hindus and Muslims. But he also called the two communities the 'two eyes' of

India, implying that they were complementary. A rift might open—or be closed.

Any who hoped to find the key to this riddle by looking back into Indian history would discover only that there were two sides to the medal. At certain periods, the two communities had co-operated, as under Akbar; at other times they had been bitterly at odds, as under Alamgir. There was now a new ingredient in the political brew: nationalism. Would nationalism make for unity (as in France) or disunity (as in Austria-Hungary)?

Nationalist writers have often asserted that British imperial policy was directed towards separating the two communities: Divide and Rule, as it has been called. It is outside the scope of this book to attempt any detailed analysis of British policy (whatever that expression may denote), but it is useful to recall the admonition of the *Friend of India*—‘avoid change’. British ‘policy’ after 1857 was predominantly conservative. In the economic sphere it had a positive, creative content (though care was taken not to upset the social balance), but in the social and political sphere, British policy was almost entirely devoted to maintaining the existing structure. The rise of the new professional middle class was viewed with distinct suspicion by the majority of British officials; themselves an intellectual elite, they had little sympathy for the Indian intellectual elite. Whenever the question was raised of increasing the share of Indians in their own government, the British officials retorted by calling for measures to bring forward the ‘natural leaders of society’. These ‘natural leaders’ were, in effect, the rural leaders; from the rustic yeoman and squire up to the great landlords and princes. Because the new middle class was overwhelmingly composed of Hindus of the literary castes, they suspected that the British were attempting to discriminate against them as Hindus. While the ‘natural leaders’ included certain Hindus (more especially of the Rajput and other martial classes), prominence was given to those landlords and retired officials who, before 1914, formed the spokesmen of the Muslim community. The Muslims were encouraged, partly because they were landlords; the Hindu politicians were discouraged, largely because they were all middle class. At the time, few perceived where this would lead.

This chapter seeks to show how the forces of tradition and conservatism have moulded society, and moulded social attitudes to authority and government. The burden of tradition weighed upon the views of both progressive and militant leaders, right down to 1914. Among both

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the extremist religious leaders who taught that British rule was sacrilege, and the moderate, Westernised political leaders who ardently desired representative institutions, none went so far as to advocate a direct challenge to British authority. The most they tried to do was to request the British government to grant boons; they approached authority humbly, as petitioners had approached the Mughal emperors. It never seems to have occurred to them, as a practical possibility, that they might take over power from the British. Yet, within a decade, the political climate was to be transformed: with the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi.

Political Movements and Independence

IT IS USUAL to date the birth of the nationalist movement from 1885, with the first session of the Indian National Congress. Yet, certain forms of proto-nationalism existed long before this date, while the strident, emotional creed of the nation-state did not arouse political India until the First World War.

As we have seen, there was from ancient times a vague, mystical sense of the unity of India. There was also a more definite spirit of Hindu resistance to Muslim dominance. This was perpetuated in the epic tales of Prithvi Raj, the last Hindu king of Delhi, and was reborn in the struggle of the Maratha prince, Sivaji, against Alamgir's efforts to extend Mughal dominion. On their side, the Muslims nourished legends of heroes and martyrs: for example, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, who resisted the Sikh kingdom in Punjab, and was killed in battle. Perhaps even more potent than this religious 'nationalism' was regional 'nationalism', founded in memories of resistance against aggression by more powerful neighbours. Thus, to this day, the Assamese honour their king, Chakradhvaj Singha, who fought for independence with the war cry, 'Better death than submit to the Bengalis'.

Finally, there were seeds of modern nationalism in the intellectual renaissance of the early nineteenth century. It has been called 'whiggish', because it fastened upon subjects like the reform of antiquated legal and administrative procedure, freedom of the press, liberty of the subject, and civil equality. This rational, secular political outlook was reinforced by the inauguration of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. A quarter of a century later, a retired civil servant, Allan Octavian Hume (son of the British Radical leader, Joseph Hume, and

the extremist religious leaders who taught that British rule was sacrilege, and the moderate, Westernised political leaders who ardently desired representative institutions, none went so far as to advocate a direct challenge to British authority. The most they tried to do was to request the British government to grant boons; they approached authority humbly, as petitioners had approached the Mughal emperors. It never seems to have occurred to them, as a practical possibility, that they might take over power from the British. Yet, within a decade, the political climate was to be transformed: with the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi.

Political Movements and Independence

IT IS USUAL to date the birth of the nationalist movement from 1885, with the first session of the Indian National Congress. Yet, certain forms of protonationalism existed long before this date, while the strident, emotional creed of the nation-state did not arouse political India until the First World War.

As we have seen, there was from ancient times a vague, mystical sense of the unity of India. There was also a more definite spirit of Hindu resistance to Muslim dominance. This was perpetuated in the epic tales of Prithi Raj, the last Hindu king of Delhi, and was reborn in the struggle of the Maratha prince, Sivaji, against Alamgir's efforts to extend Mughal dominion. On their side, the Muslims nourished legends of heroes and martyrs: for example, Sayyid Ahmad Shahid, who resisted the Sikh kingdom in Punjab, and was killed in battle. Perhaps even more potent than this religious 'nationalism' was regional 'nationalism', founded in memories of resistance against aggression by more powerful neighbours. Thus, to this day, the Assamese honour their king, Chakradhvaj Singha, who fought for independence with the war cry, 'Better death than submit to the Bengalis'.

Finally, there were seeds of modern nationalism in the intellectual renaissance of the early nineteenth century. It has been called 'whiggish', because it fastened upon subjects like the reform of antiquated legal and administrative procedure, freedom of the press, liberty of the subject, and civil equality. This rational, secular political outlook was reinforced by the inauguration of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. A quarter of a century later, a retired civil servant, Allan Octavian Hume (son of the British Radical leader, Joseph Hume, and

a convert to theosophy) appealed to the graduates of the Indian universities to convene a national congress to debate questions of social and political reform. His call was made at one of the rare moments when there was a reforming viceroy, Lord Ripon. Hume also attempted to open a channel for the aspirations of the emerging middle class by the encouragement of local self-government: by setting up municipalities with an elected element, and by creating district councils for the countryside. Both Hume and Ripon were trying to provide for 'political education' to train the new Westernised elite to participate in their own government. This concern was contrary to the prevailing British view of the necessity to resuscitate the 'natural leadership' of Indian society, while keeping the new Westernised elite ('the educated natives') in their place.

The lawyers, professors, editors and landlords who now met together each year (a little self-consciously) as the National Congress, had no ultimate goal; they were concerned only with petty, short-term improvements, such as the larger representation of Indians in the superior civil services, and their admission to commissioned rank in the Indian Army. Aptly enough, the president of the Sixth Congress, Pherozeshah Mehta, quoted (or rather, misquoted) these lines by Newman:

*Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant path—one step enough for me.*

The annual petitions of grievances by the Congress to the British government yielded almost nothing; the Congress was dismissed as a 'microscopic minority' by viceroys and secretaries of state.

About 1900, there came a departure from the gradualist, reformist approach. A Maharashtrian Brahmin, Tilak, called for a return to Hindu orthodoxy, a rejection of British innovations, taking as his model the militant struggle of the Marathas under Sivaji against the *mlecchas*. In Bengal, a terrorist, anarchist movement evoked the patronage of Kali, the dark Mother Goddess. Both movements rejected constitutional methods—the slow germination of 'political education'—for the weapon of violence.

These cults, harking back to the golden age of Hinduism, served to alarm Muslim leaders still further. Sayyid Ahmad had put his faith in higher education and in the protection of the British government; he had enjoined his community to keep out of politics, especially out of the Congress, which he dismissed as a Hindu organisation. But by the early 1900s, Sayyid Ahmad's successors were convinced that they must begin to take an active part in politics. Yet, at the level of political know-how

and experience, they were conscious of the half-century lead gained by the Hindu middle class in Western expertise; while as a minority representing one-quarter of the total population of India they believed (with good reason) that they could never secure effective representation under an elective system wherein the Hindu majority community could exclude the Muslims from any voice in the legislative councils.

The remedy sought by the Muslims was 'communal representation', or the allocation of seats to the community on the basis of its numerical strength. In 1906, a deputation of Muslims, led by the Aga Khan, made a request on these lines to the viceroy, Lord Minto, and were assured of his sympathy. Minto's attitude becomes understandable if the original purpose of the legislatures is recalled. When the original proposals for Indian representation in the legislative councils was under discussion, Sir Bartle Frere wrote (in 1860) of the necessity 'of learning what the natives think of our measures and how the native community will be affected by them'. Frere likened the role of the Indian councils to that of the *darbar* of an Indian prince. The *darbar* was essentially a sounding-board whereby the prince could ensure that his will was understood by his subjects; it was also a safety-valve for them to air their grievances against unjust officials. The early legislatures being this kind of channel of communication, it was more important to secure a wide representation of interests than to determine the choice of an electorate which (at the period in question) would necessarily be narrow and unrepresentative. The reforms sponsored by Morley, as secretary of state for India, and Minto, as viceroy, which came into effect in 1909, were intended to provide this wide representation of interests. The great landlords, the universities, commerce—and the Muslims—all received separate seats.*

Lord Morley vehemently denied that this measure was intended to lead towards parliamentary government in India. Yet, by embedding communal representation into the legislatures, he inadvertently established a precedent and a principle which could not be rescinded when parliamentary government became the object of British policy.

On the eve of the First World War, three main political groups had emerged. Within the Congress there were the 'Extremists' and the

* As an illustration of the Muslim predicament: in Punjab, the Muslims were not given separate seats under the Morley-Minto Reforms as they formed a slight majority of the population of the province; yet, at the following elections, they did not secure any of the eight elected seats in the legislature because of educational and economic backwardness and lack of effective organisation.

'Moderates' (to employ contemporary terms). The Extremists were militant, fervent religious revivalists, and advocates of the use of force the Moderates were constitutionalist, secular and gradualist. Both groups were predominantly Hindus of the literary Brahmin and Kayastha castes. The third main group was the Muslim League, founded in 1906 by an aristocratic clique of nawabs and other hereditary leaders. From left to right of this political array, there was no clear voice calling upon the British to hand over power to Indians. Moreover, though the political leaders were joined together in a National Congress, their horizons were limited to their own provinces (even the great Rabindranath Tagore, when required to indicate his nationality, subscribed himself 'Bengalee'). It is true that the cry of *Swaraj* (our own rule) had been raised; but when asked to define *Swaraj*, its exponents usually talked about 'colonial self-government'. Most educated Indians still accepted British rule as a dispensation of Divine Providence—perhaps only as a means towards national regeneration—but still an inevitable phase through which India was destined to pass. This recognition of British rule as providential was clearly shown in 1914 in the public response to the outbreak of war, when (apart from a few revolutionaries) Indians of all classes hastened to demonstrate their loyalty to the British Crown, and to the British people in their hour of trial. Indian Army divisions, it is often forgotten, formed a sizeable element in the British Expeditionary Force in France in the autumn and winter of 1914, and helped to stem the German attack while the new volunteer British armies were still under training. Subsequently, a million Indian volunteers were enlisted, and Indian troops took the brunt of the fighting in the Middle East and East Africa. Britain recognised this valiant effort. Two Indians were made members of the Imperial War Cabinet; India signed the peace treaty, and became a founder-member of the League of Nations. But before then, the Indian response had suddenly changed key: the loyal acceptance of duties had become the strident assertion of rights.

The first notable development of the war years was the rapprochement between Hindu and Muslim political leaders. This was largely engineered by M. A. Jinnah, a Muslim barrister of Bombay, belonging to the Khoja trading caste, which had traditional Hindu associations. Jinnah was a disciple of G. K. Gokhale, the moderate Congress leader who had organised the 'Servants of India', dedicated to social service. Jinnah was also accepted by the nawabs of the Muslim League, and he persuaded them to hold their annual session at the same time and place

as the Congress; in Bombay in 1915, and at Lucknow in 1916. This spirit of coexistence produced the joint Lucknow Pact of 1916, whereby Congress conceded the principle of separate electorates and seats for Muslims, and agreed upon a formula whereby the Muslims accepted a lower ratio of seats to population in their majority areas—Punjab and Bengal—in return for greatly increased representation in the other provinces where they formed a minority. In the central legislature, the Muslims were to enjoy one-third of the elected seats on a reserved basis. This pact represents the high-water mark of Hindu-Muslim agreement, and also the culmination (as it transpired) of the constitutional approach to nationalism.

During the latter years of the war, the political climate darkened. The mounting drama of Ireland was closely followed in India, and Mrs Besant founded a Home Rule for India League. The British cabinet, conscious of the debt of gratitude for the Indian war effort, and also aware of the damage which Indian unrest would cause throughout the world, decided that some special gesture must be made. In August 1917, a statement was issued in Parliament recognising the immediate need for 'the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'.

To implement this declaration, the secretary of state for India, Edwin Montagu, drafted a scheme of political devolution which became known as dyarchy. It provided, first, for the transfer of many of the functions of government from the central government of India to the provinces, along with a modicum of financial autonomy. Among these functions were what was called the 'nation-building departments', such as education, local self-government, public health, and agriculture. These were now placed under ministers who were elected members of the provincial legislatures, and responsible to those legislatures. Responsibility for the maintenance of law and order, with financial supervision, were retained under persons called 'members', who might be either British officials or Indian public men, but who were not responsible to the legislatures. These provincial legislatures now contained a majority of elected representatives, returned according to the formula agreed under the Lucknow Pact. A minority of nominated non-officials and officials completed these legislatures. At the centre, the administration was still in the hands of the viceroy and his officials (British and Indian) although the central legislature now contained a large elected element. The

authors of this scheme carefully considered the possibility of altering the system of separate Muslim representation, regarding this 'a very serious handicap to the development of the self-governing principle'; but they felt unable to change the system—and, indeed, separate constituencies were also created for the Sikhs in Punjab.

These proposals (usually called the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms) were given effect by the Government of India Act of 1919. At first, the response from Indian political leaders was favourable. Then, without warning, the whole situation was plunged into bitter confusion: a state which was to persist right up to independence.

The primary factor was the change in the leadership of the Congress, and its transformation into an entirely new kind of political organisation. It happened that death suddenly claimed almost all the senior Congress leaders: Pherozeshah Mehta, Gokhale and Tilak. Into their place stepped M. K. Gandhi, newly returned from his campaign against racial discrimination in South Africa. There he had developed a technique called *Satyagraha*: literally, 'zeal for truth', but usually translated as 'soul force'. The technique depended on the passive defiance of the law, or civil disobedience, by bands of volunteers.

On his return to India, Gandhi first became one of Gokhale's social service workers. His next important task was an investigation into the grievances of the cultivators of Champaran District in Bihar, who were victimised and exploited by the European indigo-planters. This experience gave Gandhi considerable insight into peasant conditions, and also helped him develop a technique of disarming British officialdom by placing them in positions where they felt legally and morally uneasy. However, during the war years, Gandhi's objectives were still limited to moving the British government to redress injustice, in the accepted manner. He even undertook a recruiting campaign on behalf of the war effort. Like others, his first response to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms was favourable.

Then came the Amritsar Massacre.

The aftermath of the war brought a surge of discontent to the Indian continent. The authorities replied by tightening up public order. At Amritsar, in April 1919, mob disorders seemed likely to lead to anarchy. The local military commander imposed martial law, and dispersed a militant demonstration by indiscriminate firing in which 379 Indians were killed. This tragedy probably did more than anything else to embitter racial relations between British and Indians; but the Congress did not immediately abandon the policy of co-operation. However, with

the publication of the Treaty of Sèvres, which liquidated the power of the Turkish sultan, the 'Caliph of the Faithful', a surge of pan-Islamic feeling swept through the Muslims of India; and the Congress, led by Gandhi, determined to enter this Khilafat movement to further Muslim-Hindu unity and to challenge British power.

Gandhi's lead was not accepted without a struggle. A large section of the Congress, true to the moderate, gradualist philosophy, adhered to constitutional methods. They broke from the Congress and contested the elections for the new, reformed legislatures; subsequently they formed ministries in several provinces, identifying themselves by the political label of 'Liberal Federation'. But although the Liberals included some of the most able and idealistic political leaders, they ultimately failed to consolidate their position because they failed to create a solid following. It was Gandhi's particular genius to realise that any truly national movement must be based upon the support of the masses, and to perceive how this support might be mobilised. In the words of Dr Rajendra Prasad, president of India, he 'shifted politics from the drawing-rooms of the educated and the business men to the huts of the tillers of the soil'.* This change came about because Gandhi had learned to present himself and his message to the people in traditional terms. About 1920, he abandoned Western dress for homespun, *khadi*, and similarly he clothed Western ideas in Hindu guise. He dramatised civil disobedience in a way all could understand: by making salt from brine on the sea shore, in defiance of the salt regulations. *Satyagraha* was not really a traditional Hindu concept, but as presented by Gandhi it was accepted into the mainstream of Hindu custom. Similarly, *ahimsa*, 'non-violence' was inspired by Tolstoy, Ruskin, and the Sermon on the Mount; but Gandhi presented *ahimsa* as part of the superior ethical philosophy of Hinduism. This was in marked contrast to the teaching of political leaders such as Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, who stressed the heroic, challenging, sacrificing, conquering traditions of Hinduism. In linking his first civil disobedience movement with the militant Khilafat agitation, Gandhi was treading on dangerous ground. Too dangerous, it transpired: at Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces, a Congress mob murdered twenty-two police constables in cold blood; while, in south India, the Khilafat campaign led to a religious uprising by the Moplah tribe, in which hundreds of Hindus were slain. Gandhi called off his civil disobedience campaign, announcing that his followers did not yet understand non-violence.

* Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay 1957. p. 131.

For several years, the influence of Gandhi was in eclipse. The Khilafat movement collapsed when Ataturk abolished the office of caliph in March 1924. Hindu-Muslim co-operation dwindled. Further sections of the Congress (known as 'Responsivists') broke away to join the Liberals in trying to work the dyarchy experiment. Parties appeared as alternatives to the Congress. In Madras, the Justice Party was founded to represent the non-Brahmins, Congress being identified with Brahmin domination and the Brahmin monopoly of public office. The Justice Party was able to form a ministry and make inroads into Brahmin exclusivism. Punjab politics was aligned on the basis of rural leadership versus urban interests. Fazl-i-Husain (whose political loyalties were, like Jinnah's, both to Congress and the Muslim League) created the Unionist Party, which included Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. He endeavoured to ameliorate communal rivalries by prescribing fixed percentages, based on population, for the three communities in the public services and in educational institutions. He also launched a programme of rural development and local self-government.

These attempts by the Liberals and others to provide an alternative to the Congress appeal foundered partly because these moderate men were wholeheartedly supported neither by British officialdom nor by the traditionalist, conservative landlords. When elements of the Congress decided to contest the elections, between them and the landlords, the Liberals found themselves 'in the unenviable position of the proverbial earthen pot between two brass vessels'.* As the one exception, the Unionist Party continued to dominate Punjab politics until the eve of independence, and it was consistently supported by the landlords and by the officials.

Gandhi refused to consider entry into the dyarchy legislatures. At length, his opportunity returned with the appointment of the Simon Commission—from which Indian representatives were wholly excluded—to report on India's constitutional future. A boycott of the commission largely frustrated its inquiries, while a successful campaign against the payment of taxes at Bardoli, in Bombay Province, restored the prestige of civil disobedience. The adherence of Motilal Nehru and his son, Jawaharlal, to Gandhi's point of view gave him added strength.

Motilal Nehru had been steadily moving away from the 'gradualist' position. Speaking in the central legislature of the approaching inquiry into India's constitutional advance, he declared to the British govern-

* C. Y. Chintamani and M. R. Masani, *India's Constitution at Work*, Bombay 1949, p. 7.